

How's The Weather Up There In Heber?

For 141 years, J Crook and his family have had the right answer to the age-old question

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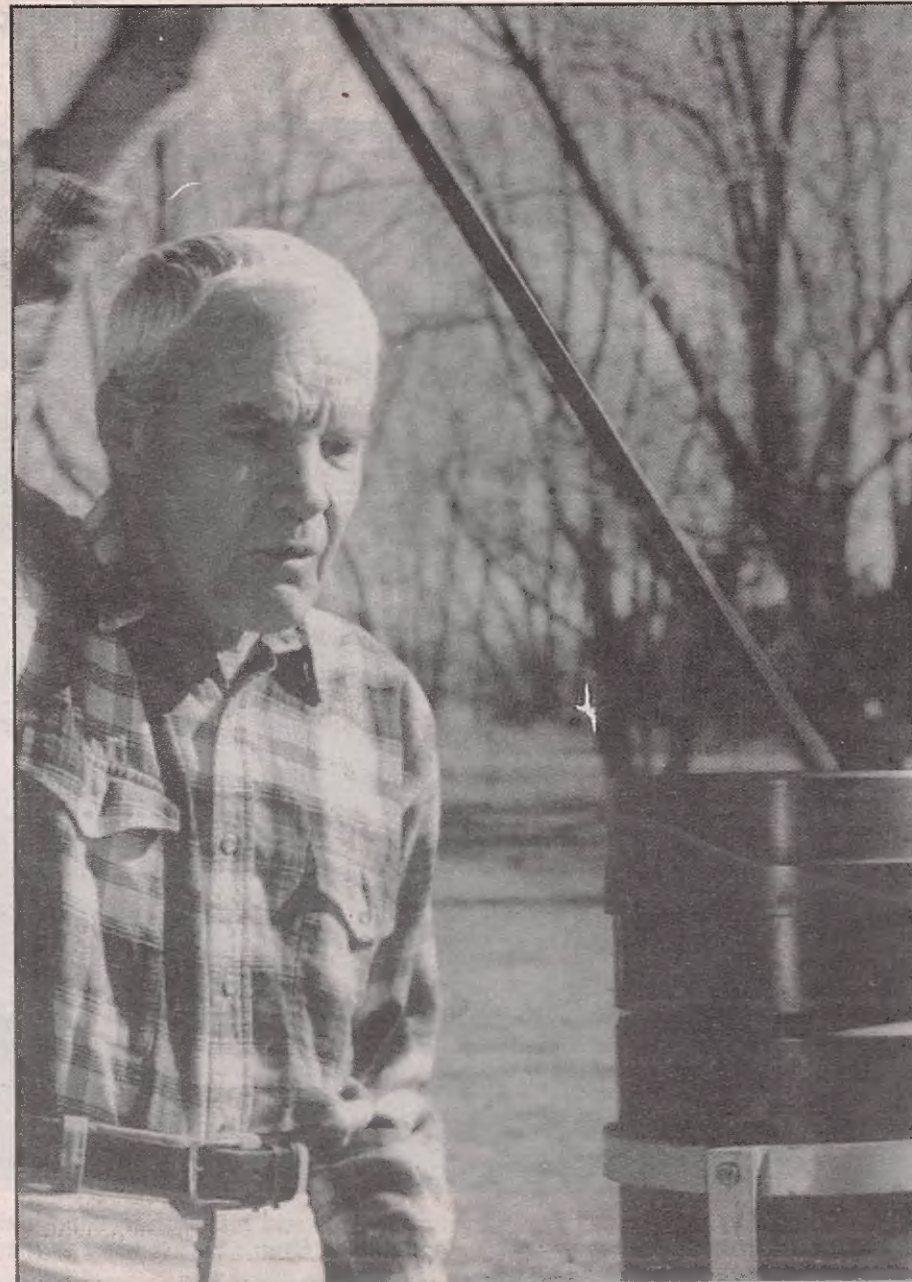
Everyday at five o'clock, J Crook goes out and checks the weather. Odd, since it's p.m., not a.m. when he's checking, and just about anything that the weather might affect has already been affected by early evening. But Crook doesn't just check the weather for his own benefit; he's checking for the benefit of every resident in Wasatch County.

For over 141 years, Crook, and his ancestors before him, has been checking the weather, earning the role, and obligation, as the official National Weather Service station in Wasatch County. Each day, Crook records the high and low temperatures, the amounts of precipitation, and the snow measurement, if any. Then he makes a daily report of his data to the National Weather Service in Salt Lake, and a weekly report to Utah State University in Logan.

Crook's not in it for the money. In fact, he and his wife, Phyllis, who helps Crook with the reporting, work on an all-volunteer basis. Crook does it because it's in his blood.

Crook's whole weather-reporting gig started with his great grandfather, John Crook, who, according to Phyllis, was one of the 10 original settlers to enter the Heber Valley. Great Grandpa Crook wrote down the weather daily in a journal. "He did it for himself," says Crook, long before the National Weather Service even existed.

In 1873, the elder Crook procured some weather instruments from the Smithsonian and started keeping a more detailed and exact log. That, in turn, earned him an appointment as the official weather observer for the area in 1893.



the snow's depth.

Like the rest of the family, Crook's interest in the weather came from working the land. For years, Crook raised dairy cows on their property and worked as a postal carrier; knowing the weather just seemed to go hand-in-hand with his chosen businesses. "It's just like milking cows," says Crook of the day-in, day-out aspect of checking the weather.

Over the years, after Crook took over the family hobby, he and Phyllis started to take note of oddities in the weather, particularly by their house. "We had a freak tornado come through here years ago...it lifted the whole hay shed," says Phyllis.

"We had lightening hit a tree by the weather station," says Crook.

"We had three feet of snow in one day. We had to shovel a path to the weather station," says Phyllis. "But now we don't have the extremes. We used to have more storms."

Unfortunately, this generation of Crooks could be the last in Heber Valley's weather-reporting dynasty. While the Crooks have six children, none of them lives in the area. They've thought of enlisting distant relatives to take over one day, but so far, nothing has been finalized. "We had a young man who wanted to do this in Midway, though," says Crook, although since Midway tends to report greater precipitation than some of the other parts of the Heber Valley, Crook doesn't know if the Weather Service will be receptive.

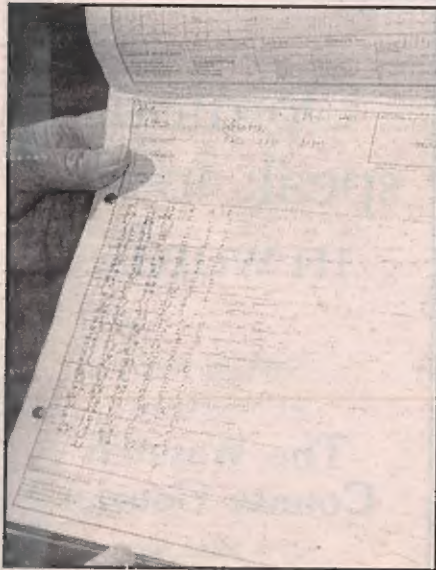
But even if this does turn out to be the final generation of amateur meteorologists in the Crook family, they've

Following in John Crook's footsteps were H. G. Crook, Lindsay Crook, and Lynn Webster, each man having two things in common—bloodlines and an interest in the weather. J Crook is no exception.

In 1976, Crook moved the station to his Heber farm where it has stood, being checked by Crook, his wife, or a neighbor on the occasions that the Crooks leave town, on a daily basis. Once every six months, the National Weather Service, who owns and maintains the equipment, comes up to test the station. Occasionally others inquire.

"Sometimes farmers want to know the first frost," says Crook.

"A lawyer had called, he wanted to know what a certain day's weather was like in the winter," says Phyllis.



Phyllis Crook helps her husband with his weather reporting by maintaining a log book for the weather service.

J Crook has been reporting the highs, the lows, and the amount of moisture in Heber to the National Weather Service for years.

Apparently there had been some question as to whether a client could have slipped on some ice in the Heber Valley that day, so the attorney was referred to the Crooks. "We have to go back through the records."

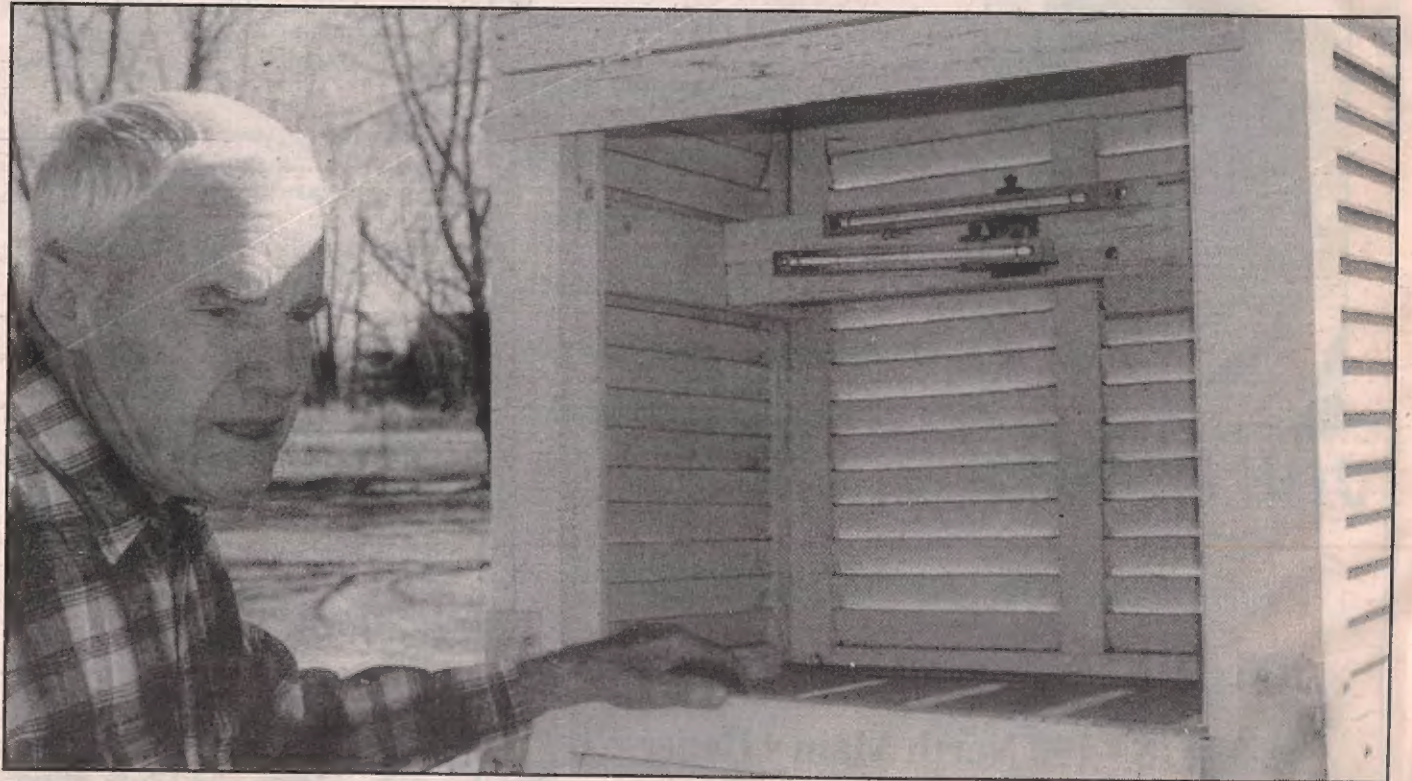
But the Crooks always have the answer, keeping a detailed high and low log, along with the levels of any new precipitation. In the summer, a long, skinny tube sits just outside the weather station

and the rain levels are checked with a modified metal ruler. In the winter, a wider tube is used for catching snow.

"But there's not been any snow this year," says Crook. Yes, but in years that there is snow, Crook takes the metal tube inside the house, heats up its contents and takes a measurement of the water content to determine the local inches of precipitation. A yard stick is the official device he uses for measuring

enjoyed their reign over the years. A few years ago, Channel 4 came up to visit, they've also received coverage in the *Deseret News* and the *Salt Lake Tribune*. But their greatest honor came in 1986 when they received the John Camphius Holm Award from the NOAA for their family's years of service.

While the Crooks are enjoying the sun and reporting ease of this nearly snowless winter ("we've had a few days with half-an-inch of rain," says Crook), they won't venture into what might be in store for the rest of winter and spring. "We don't predict," says Phyllis, "that way we can't be blamed." **W**



To accurately test the local temperature, all instruments are contained in a box that prohibits the sunlight from affecting the temperature.